

Development of Sea and Island Tourism in the South-West Coastal Region of Vietnam: Study of Current Situation and Development Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Sea and island tourism is one of the attractive types of tourism that has attracted many tourists in recent years. Especially, the southwestern sea in Vietnam. In this sea area, Nam Du archipelago and Lai Son island in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province are places with many strengths and conditions to develop sea and island tourism. In recent times, although sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province has developed strongly, attracting many tourists. However, the district has not really developed this type of tourism in quality and efficiency. Therefore, the aims of this study is to assess the current status of sea and island tourism development in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province through the opinions of 130 domestic tourists who have traveled to the sea and islands in the district. Thereby, the author proposes a number of solutions to improve and enhance the quality of sea and island tourism in the research area.

KEYWORDS: *Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province, sea and island tourism, south-west coastal region, Vietnam*

How to cite this paper: Tri Thong Truong "Development of Sea and Island Tourism in the South-West Coastal Region of Vietnam: Study of Current Situation and Development Solutions"

Published in
International
Journal of Trend in
Scientific Research
and Development
(ijtsrd), ISSN:
2456-6470,
Volume-8 | Issue-6,
December 2024, pp.208-212, URL:
www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd70561.pdf



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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism is developing strongly and becoming a key economic sector in many countries with the great benefits it brings. With the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization, it has encouraged tourists to seek nature, places with wild landscapes and fresh air; therefore, many new types of tourism have appeared to serve that need such as rural tourism, community tourism, garden tourism, island tourism, ... in which, island tourism is attractive and attracts many tourists of all ages. This is because there are recreational activities on islands, natural beauty (Lockhart, 1997), strange coral reefs with unique marine life (Royle, 2002), unique cultural and natural experiences on islands that are different from everyday life (Carlsen and Butler, 2011). It is these special attractions that make the islands one of the most popular tourist destinations today.

Vietnam has great potential for sea and island tourism with a long coastline and countless valuable islands for tourism development. Seeing this, the Ministry of

Culture, Sports and Tourism (2013) proposed the project "Developing sea, island and coastal tourism in Vietnam by 2020" and affirmed that "by 2020, sea tourism will become the driving force of Vietnam's marine economy". In the Southwest sea of Vietnam, there are many conditions for development and attracting tourists with its sea and island tourism resources. In particular, Kien Giang is one of the provinces in the Mekong Delta, the province has many islands and archipelagos in the southwestern sea with many potentials and strengths to develop island tourism such as Phu Quoc island, Nam Du archipelago, Lai Son island (Hon Son or Hon Son Rai), Ba Lua archipelago, Hai Tac island, ... In particular, Nam Du archipelago and Lai Son island in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province in recent years have become prominent destinations for island tourism, attracting many domestic and foreign tourists. The development of tourism in general and island tourism in recent times has had a positive impact on Kien Hai district such as contributing to

GDP growth, economic development, job creation, increased income and improved lives of local people, ... Although island tourism in Kien Hai district has developed strongly and grown rapidly, it is still spontaneous, the planning is not suitable, leading to some problems and not achieving high efficiency. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the current status of island tourism development in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province through tourists' assessments, thereby proposing some solutions to develop island tourism in the area better as well as increase competitiveness with other destinations in and outside the region in the coming time.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The study collected primary data using a questionnaire with a convenient sampling method and developed using Google Forms. According to Williams et al. (2010), the sample size for the study required $n \geq 100$. The study sample included 130 domestic tourists who had traveled to Nam Du archipelago and Lai Son island in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province in December 2023. Primary data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 software with

descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and average values.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Current situation of sea and island tourism development in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province

3.1.1. Current situation of tourists' activities when participating in sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province

According to the survey results, tourists know about island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province mainly through relatives, friends; Internet and travel companies. In addition, a significant number of tourists also know about island tourism in Kien Hai through newspapers, magazines and television. The proportion of information sources through handbooks/tourist guidebooks accounts for a very small proportion (Fig. 1). Therefore, to attract more tourists, especially potential tourists, to island tourism in Kien Hai in the near future, it is necessary to pay more attention to promoting tourism information sources through word of mouth, the Internet and travel companies.

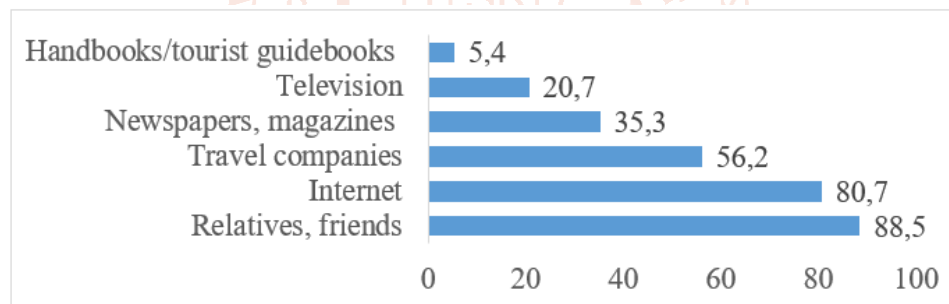


Figure 1. Sources of information tourists know about sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district (%)

Source: Analysis from research data

In addition, their main form of tourism is self-organized by friends (63.1%), followed by self-organized by agencies and organizations (43.8%), self-organized by families (32.3%) and finally buying tours from travel companies (27.7%). According to the survey results of 130 tourists, up to 52.3% of tourists come to Kien Hai district for the first time, the third time is quite high (28.5%), the second time is 13.1% and more than three times is low (6.2%). Tourists come to Kien Hai district for the main purposes of sightseeing, entertainment (93.8%), relaxation (88.5%) and swimming (60.0%). Some others make trips for the purpose of studying-researching, working and doing business with low rates (24.6% and 2.3% respectively). At the same time, the reason tourists come to the island is because of the beautiful scenery; clear blue sea; fresh and diverse seafood (respectively 95.3%; 82.3% and 63.1%). In addition, tourists also travel because of the clean environment (32.3%), the friendliness and hospitality of the people (19.2%). Therefore, if the scenery, the hygiene of the sea water as well as the diversification of seafood dishes on the island are maintained and protected, surely in the near future, island tourism in Kien Hai, Kien Giang province in general will become more attractive and attract more tourists.

The activities that tourists have done when traveling in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang include: swimming (95.3%); enjoying seafood (82.3%); diving to see coral (63.1%); Visiting cultural architectures (32.3%) and other activities (19.2%) such as mountain climbing, fishing, squid fishing, etc. Thereby, we can see that swimming, enjoying seafood and diving to see coral are outstanding activities in island tourism in Kien Hai; therefore, local authorities and relevant agencies related to tourism activities as well as travel companies need to pay attention to this issue to effectively promote the strengths of island tourism in the locality.

3.2. Current situation of sea and island tourism development in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province

Based on Table 1, in general, tourists' opinions on the current status of island tourism development in Kien Hai district are at a good level ($M=3.49$). According to tourists' perceptions, the 9 factors in island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province are evaluated in descending order as "tourism resources", "people", "technical facilities", "safety and security", "promotion and promotion", "tourism service prices", "infrastructure", "entertainment", "hygiene and environment". The following is the assessment of tourists for each factor.

Tourism resources: In the 9 groups of factors above, the tourism resources group is the highest rated ($M=3.94$), all criteria in this group are at a good level with a high average value from 3.83 to 4.05; in which, beach scenery is the highest ($M=4.05$). It can be seen that the tourism resources here are very diverse and rich, from natural resources to human resources. Therefore, local authorities and leaders at all levels related to the tourism sector need to pay attention to exploiting and preserving the values of tourism resources in the sea and islands of Kien Hai district effectively to attract tourists better in the present and the future.

People: Next is the group of human factors, which is considered one of the important factors that shape the development of tourism as well as the quality of tourism products. This group of human factors is rated by tourists at a good level ($M=3.70$); in which the friendliness and hospitality of local people is 3.77; the enthusiasm and friendliness of staff at tourist attractions is 3.74; the knowledge and skills of tour guides is 3.68; and finally, the ability to serve quickly of staff at tourist attractions is 3.60.

Technical facilities: The group of technical facilities factors is rated by tourists at a good level ($M=3.62$) with all criteria achieving an average value of over 3.50. Specifically, the convenience of accommodation facilities ($M=3.70$); the diversity of accommodation facilities ($M=3.64$) and the diversity of dining facilities ($M=3.53$). In fact, the accommodation facilities on the island are very diverse with accommodation types such as homestays, motels, hotels, bungalows, resorts, etc. and these accommodation facilities all ensure amenities to serve the essential needs of tourists when staying at a destination including fans, air conditioners, televisions, wifi, etc. In addition, the dining facilities here are very diverse, many restaurants with typical dishes of the island sea are prepared in a variety of ways.

Safety and security: The safety and security factor group is rated at a good level ($M=3.60$) with the criteria for political management at the destination, management of begging, soliciting and price gouging all achieving an average score of over 3.40 (good level of attraction), except for the management of hygiene and food safety with an average value of 3.31 (average level of attraction). Through that, we can see that the political situation as well as the situation of begging, soliciting and price gouging in Kien Hai district are still well ensured despite the development of tourism, so local authorities need to pay attention and maintain stability so that tourists feel secure when coming here.

Promotion: In tourism, it is very important for the existence and development of the destination. Promoting and promoting sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district to tourists has created a successful step through the assessment that this is one of the things that attracts them to travel to the sea and islands here ($M=3.59$). Creating that success is due to the promotional price of the tourism program ($M=3.62$); the eye-catching advertising models of sea and island tourism in Kien Hai ($M=3.59$) and the diversity of sea and island tourism programs in Kien Hai ($M=3.56$).

Tourism service prices: Next, the group of tourism service price factors is also assessed at a good level ($M=3.44$), 2/4 criteria above 3.40 are sightseeing prices and shopping prices. However, tourists think that the prices of accommodation and food are only at a normal level. This proves that the prices of accommodation and food here are still high and not suitable for tourists' budgets.

Infrastructure: Infrastructure is one of the factors that tourists do not evaluate well ($M=3.39$), specifically the quality of the road surface on the island with an average value of 3.27 and the spaciousness of the tourist wharf is 3.32. However, the issue of the adequacy of means of transport and the spaciousness of the roads on the island attracts tourists better.

Entertainment activities: This is an essential need of tourists when traveling, the entertainment factor in island tourism in Kien Hai district has not really developed well ($M=3.10$), most of the criteria have an average value below 3.30 (from 3.25 to 2.90). This is because there are not many entertainment activities for tourists on the island, especially at night because there is a lot of free time at this time; At the same time, there are not many shops on the island to serve the shopping needs of tourists, and there are very few souvenir stalls.

Hygiene and environment: Hygiene and environment are the factors that tourists rate the lowest ($M=3.06$), proving that hygiene and environment here are still not guaranteed. In particular, the issue that is rated lowest is

the hygiene situation at the beach (M=2.14); the cleanliness of the pier and dining facilities is also not highly rated, only reaching an average level. In fact, the beaches still have household waste, garbage from tourists such as plastic bags, plastic bottles. However, the criterion of cleanliness of accommodation facilities is rated quite well.

Table 1. Tourists' assessment of the current development situation of sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province

| Criteria | Mean | Conclusion |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Tourism resources | 3.94 | Good |
| Natural landscape | 3.94 | Good |
| Island climate | 3.97 | Good |
| Beach scenery | 4.05 | Good |
| Local cuisine appeal | 3.91 | Good |
| Uniqueness of indigenous culture | 3.83 | Good |
| 2. Infrastructure | 3.39 | Normal |
| Road width on the island | 3.45 | Good |
| Road Surface quality on the island | 3.27 | Normal |
| Adequacy of transportation on the island | 3.50 | Good |
| Wideness of cruise terminal | 3.32 | Normal |
| 3. Technical facilities | 3.62 | Good |
| Variety of accommodation | 3.64 | Good |
| Lodging amenities | 3.70 | Good |
| Different dining facilities | 3.53 | Good |
| 4. Entertainment | 3.10 | Normal |
| Variety of shopping and souvenir shops | 3.16 | Normal |
| Entertainment activities at the destination | 3.25 | Normal |
| Nightlife activities | 2.90 | Normal |
| 5. People | 3.70 | Good |
| Friendliness and hospitality of the people | 3.77 | Good |
| Friendliness and hospitality of the staff at tourist attractions | 3.74 | Good |
| Quick service of the staff at the actual tourist attractions | 3.60 | Good |
| Knowledge and skills of the tour guides | 3.68 | Good |
| 6. Hygiene and environment | 3.06 | Normal |
| Beach hygiene | 2.14 | Poor |
| Tourist pier hygiene | 3.32 | Normal |
| Accommodation hygiene | 3.45 | Good |
| Food and beverage hygiene | 3.32 | Normal |
| 7. Safety and security | 3.60 | Good |
| Food safety and hygiene management | 3.31 | Normal |
| Tourism management | 3.58 | Good |
| Price gouging management | 3.44 | Good |
| Begging management | 3.79 | Good |
| Political management at the destination | 3.87 | Good |
| 8. Tourism service prices | 3.44 | Good |
| Sightseeing prices (tickets, vehicle rentals, entertainment, etc.) | 3.67 | Good |
| Shopping prices | 3.45 | Good |
| Food prices | 3.33 | Normal |
| Accommodation prices | 3.32 | Normal |
| 9. Promotion | 3.59 | Good |
| The eye-catching advertising models of island tourism in Kien Hai | 3.59 | Good |
| The diversity of island tourism programs in Kien Hai | 3.56 | Good |
| The promotional price of the tourism program | 3.62 | Good |
| General assessment | 3.49 | Good |

Source: Analysis from research data

3.3. Solutions for developing island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province

Through the above research results, some solutions are proposed to develop sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province more effectively as well as increase the ability to attract tourists in the coming time as follows:

Firstly, the issue of hygiene and environment in the islands in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province is currently of great concern. Therefore, there should be signs prohibiting littering at tourist attractions, on beaches and along roads on the island, as well as volunteer teams regularly cleaning up around the island; regularly propagating and educating people about disposing of household waste outside, especially into the marine environment; equipping trash bins at tourist attractions, at tourist piers, and at food establishments; In addition, it is necessary to have measures to check the quality of food at dining establishments such as processing methods, freshness of seafood, expiry date of ingredients, etc. to ensure food hygiene and safety for tourists.

Second, entertainment activities not only help tourists satisfy their travel needs but also help them save time when they have nothing to do. Therefore, it is necessary to increase entertainment activities for tourists, especially night entertainment activities because this is the most free time when tourists come to Nam Du archipelago as well as Lai Son island; at the same time, build more shopping stores on the island as well as encourage local people to open souvenir stalls to sell products to tourists.

Third, infrastructure is one of the factors that make up the quality of tourism services. Infrastructure on the island still has many limitations; Therefore, local authorities need to have more investment and improvement policies, in which improving the quality of the road surface is the top priority, followed by expanding the tourist wharf to create comfort and accessibility for tourists. Fourth, service prices have a great influence on tourist demand, and the ability to pay of each customer is different. Therefore, it is necessary to require accommodation and food

establishments to publicly post prices, especially during holidays and Tet; regularly check the prices of accommodation and food establishments to see if they serve at the listed prices or not; have regulations to punish establishments that serve at prices higher than the listed prices and regulated prices.

4. CONCLUSION

Sea and island tourism is the strength of Kien Giang province in general and Kien Hai district in particular. According to the research results, for sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, the factors of "tourism resources", "people", "technical facilities", "safety and security", "promotion and promotion", "tourism service prices" are assessed as good; however, the factors of "infrastructure", "entertainment", "hygiene and environment" are the opposite. Therefore, in order for sea and island tourism in Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province to develop, become more attractive and attract more tourists in the Mekong Delta region in particular and the whole country in general in the coming time, it is necessary to pay attention, invest and improve the above aspects.

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